

Interview: March, 1969

Mr. L.

Born in Bukovina

Graduate Univ. of Chernovtsy

Scholarship at Institute of Geology, Leningrad University, where he received

Candidate of Science degree.

Sent to teach at University of Kiev

Taught at Chernovtsy University for a year.

Married to a Russian girl. One child.

Wife and child remained in the Soviet Union.

Visiting relatives in Hamilton, Ontario.

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Culture

In the cultural area there is no evidence that central policy is explicitly designed to discriminate against Ukrainians. However, the atmosphere that exists allows those Russians at the local level who want to discriminate to do so. He did feel that if there were greater pressure and determination on the part of Ukrainians, many things could be done and have been done. In this connection he cited the example of Estonian scientists who, acting in a perfectly normal way, gave papers in the Estonian language at a inter-republic scientific conference held in Estonia that he had attended, and also commented in Estonian on papers delivered by Russians. This persistence by Balts and Georgians could also be noticed in the field of publications. All this in his view, was facilitated by the greater difference between these languages and Russian than between Ukrainian and Russian.

As an example of successful pressure by Ukrainians he cited the permission granted "a couple of years ago" to use the Ukrainian language in all courses at Kiev University. He himself saw no particular need to do this in the natural sciences; but it was outrageous that Ukrainian was not used more in the social sciences and humanities. It is in these areas that the use of Ukrainian is most important, he said. Nevertheless, the use of Russian persists because of the large numbers of Russians (about 50% of the student body) and the sizeable fraction (about 40%) of Ukrainian students who are indifferent to the language of instruction. At the first meeting of each course (this is the policy) the professor asks the class in which language it wishes to be instructed. By a show of hands students indicate their preference. Consequently, a large number of courses are taught in Russian, because only 30% (roughly) of the students want Ukrainian. This choice of language is not true of other universities in the Ukraine or of ynzy in general, even in the Kiev region. In these institutions some people persist in lecturing in Ukrainian, but most courses are taught in Russian.

L. said that the celebration of Shevchenko's anniversary had become an annual event at Kiev University. Usually it ended in the same way--with students being dispersed by firemen with water hoses, after speeches, singing, and the recitation of Shevchenko's verses. These are illegal gatherings, because permission to hold them is never granted by the University and by the city government. He claimed that this repression was totally unnecessary, and in fact simply had the opposite effect from that intended.

university
lecturer in the area

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Language

L. thought that people in the West tended to overemphasize the significance of the language issue. Language was important, but not critical. Again, policy in this area as in others depended to a great extent upon the degree of pressure exerted by the Ukrainians themselves. He admitted that there were many cases in which persons who persisted in using Ukrainian were needled and made to feel uncomfortable. He mentioned the case of several mothers who had insisted that their children be taught in Ukrainian in high school, but were refused on the grounds that this would cause inconvenience.

L. also indicated that it was difficult to subscribe to Ukrainian-language Soviet newspapers or to obtain books in the Ukrainian language printed in small editions. He himself had to purchase several Soviet Ukrainian-language books in Canada, since these could not be obtained in Kiev.

The implication of his view on the language question was that language per se was not necessarily connected with the striving for greater Ukrainian autonomy. Some individuals who were unable to speak good Ukrainian were nevertheless pushing for greater Ukrainian rights in the political and economic spheres. (L. himself had a stake in this position, since he was married to a Russian and frequently used Russian words accidentally while speaking Ukrainian--for which he apologized with embarrassment. Obviously he spoke Russian as his everyday language.)

Anti-semitism

L. admitted that there existed a quota on the admission of Jews to universities in the Soviet Union. He claimed that the quota had been introduced "recently" (meaning in the past 10 years roughly, under Khrushchev). The implication of his reference to the quota was that it permitted an increase in the admission of Ukrainian students, because--he said--the level of admission of Russians had continued to be more or less the same. He admitted that anti-semitic feelings persisted in the Soviet Union as a whole and in the Ukraine, as well as in the Ukrainian universities. He noted in this context that there is a great influx of Jews into the Ukraine from other parts of the Soviet Union--especially into the cities. This immigration intensifies the problem of anti-semitism, because of such factors as shortage of housing, services, etc. Jews who migrate to the Ukraine frequently have more money than local people, and thus are able to bribe officials more easily and obtain scarce accommodations, etc. Bribery, he admitted, was the accepted way of obtaining scarce things. He cited numerous examples, ranging from obtaining residence permits to live in cities, to getting vacation passes, to acquiring apartment space, etc.

L. was intimately familiar with the affair of Dziuba's speech at Babii Yar, in which he called for mutual tolerance and support between Jews and Ukrainians. L. said that some Ukrainian intellectuals were unhappy with the speech, but he himself favoured it both for political and moral reasons. Some Ukrainian intellectuals still feel threatened by the large numbers of Jews in the Ukraine who are in competition with them for jobs. The same feelings were endangered by competition for university admission, especially since the Russian quota appears to be unchanging.

L. added that it appears not to be known in the West that a sizeable emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union has been taking place in recent years.

Political Science

L. was very interested in finding out about the contents of Western Political Science and the methods by which it was taught. He explained his interest by pointing out that the social sciences are not thought highly of (to say the least) in the Soviet Union, because it is recognized that one may have to change one's interpretation of phenomena from day to day. He was pleased to hear that in the West "bourgeois objectivism" was the rule, and that academic freedom was protected by all sorts of institutions which allowed one to interpret things as one saw fit regardless of political changes.

L. spoke of the significance of the attestation procedures in granting higher academic degrees. After the public defense of one's thesis, the recommendation by the defense committee, and the recommendation by the Learned Council of the institution that the degree be granted, it still remains necessary to obtain the approval of the Attestation Commission in Moscow. Sometimes the Commission rejects unanimous recommendations from below. He knew of instances in which Ukrainian scholars were rejected in such a way by the Commission, and he feels that this had been done on purely political and not scholarly grounds. There was enormous pressure within the entire Soviet scholarly profession to abolish this attestation process.

Underground publications

L. attempted to find out how underground publications from the Ukraine were received in the West. He also asked whether honoraria were set aside for any Soviet author whose works were published in the West. In this connection he cited rumours in the Soviet Union that Khrushchev had piled up a tidy sum in Swiss banks from the sale of translated speeches and writings.

Economics

The development of local industry, particularly in overpopulated rural areas, was a very sensitive issue. There were two reasons: the unemployment problem, and migration. There is much pressure to develop local industries, but it has not evoked much response from the regime.

L. distinguished "deportation" from "migration" processes. He pointed out, for example, that there had been the forcible deportation of about 100,000 Estonians as recently as 1955. However, there had been no forcible deportations in the Ukraine to his knowledge in recent years. Migratory processes, both into and out of the Ukraine, were very complex. The main motives behind the migration of both Ukrainians and Russians were the desire to leave the village (his own father in 1968 earned 12 rubles a month in wages as a collective farmer), the striving to acquire valuable skills, and the urge to live in the cities. The policies of the regime indirectly promoted migration and channeled it in certain directions, but did not produce it in a coercive manner. Replying to the proposition that migration out of the Ukraine meant a depletion of a vital element in maintaining the existence of the Ukraine, L. pointed out that this was an oversimplification of a complex problem. To begin with, it is true that those who emigrate tend to be the most active types. Yet their departure is not necessarily a total loss to the Ukraine because a large percentage of those people later return--primarily to the cities. This is one way of moving from the village to the city. Russian peasants do the same thing; that is, they leave the R.S.F.S.R. and go to work on collective farms in Kherson Oblast, where there is an insatiable demand for labour; and from there they can return to

cities in the R.S.F.S.R. (It is easier to make this type of move if one goes outside one's own republic.) L. said that it was easier for Ukrainians in the R.S.F.S.R. or Asiatic republics to move to cities in these same republics than it was for Russian peasants in the Ukraine to move to Ukrainian cities. But L. admitted that this was merely his impression, and was not based on statistical evidence. He also stated that it was wrong to assume that because the Russians were the dominant nationality in the Soviet Union, they automatically had a higher living standard in the R.S.F.S.R. than did Ukrainians in the Ukraine. As a matter of fact, the "Ruskii Ivan in the mass lives worse than the Ukrainian Ivan." This did not apply to Russians in the Ukraine, because a majority of them held official positions. Likewise, Ukrainians in the R.S.F.S.R. who held similar posts also had a higher standard of living than the mass of Russians. /An instructor in a university in the Ukraine receives from 80-100 rubles per month. A department chairman gets around 300 rubles./ When a Ukrainian peasant goes to work in Siberia, he can make enough money to bribe his way into a city when he returns to the Ukraine, if he so desires. L. did say that there was some attrition of Ukrainians who emigrated due to marriage, etc.

Personalities

L. knew most of the young writers and poets personally, especially those referred to collectively as "the group of the 1960's" (the shestydesiatnyky, as they are known abroad and in Presov). These include Korotich, who has been abroad several times; the poetess Lina Kostenko; Dziuba; the movie director Paradzhan, a Georgian who lives in Kiev, was recently divorced, and whose flat is used for all sorts of open discussion meetings. L. referred to this Georgian in glowing terms, and stressed his love for Ukrainian culture. He described Dziuba as a quiet, unassuming individual whom one would not think on first acquaintance to be capable of what he has done. L. agreed that Dziuba's defense of collaboration between Ukrainians and Jews was in the best tradition of important Ukrainian writers and poets of the past.

Kolasky and the Stashynskyi affair

L. knew of Kolasky and inquired about his whereabouts and activities. He asked whether or not Kolasky's present activities were simply designed to further his own interests. With regard to Stashynskyi he stated that neither he nor anyone in Kiev realized that Bander and Rebet had been assassinated by a Soviet agent--a "comrade from Lvov," as he put it, and a Ukrainian. It was thought that the Germans had killed them. Having read the trial documents, L. no longer doubted Stashynskyi's guilt.

Czechoslovakia

L. knew about the Ukrainian writers in the Presov region, but was not a reader or subscriber to any of their publications. L. said there had been some uneasiness among Ukrainian intellectuals over the Czechoslovak events--as there had been in Moscow and Leningrad.

Study of Soviet politics abroad

L. admitted that generally speaking, conditions were better abroad for studying current Soviet politics than in the Soviet Union itself. He did say that there were certain advantages of coming to the U.S.S.R. just to get a feeling for the atmosphere and to talk with people.

The Movie on the Ukrainian Insurgent Army

A movie was produced dealing with the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and its operations in the Carpathians. But unlike past films, the positive hero in this one was a commander in the UPA. The thrust of the film was against the UPA, and the hero had support from the populace because of his personal qualities, not for political reasons. However, the film was never passed for viewing and has not been shown. L. considered this to be foolish, and stated that the purely propagandistic films achieve the opposite result from that intended.